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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000551

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN AND WHA/PPC, OSD FOR A/S STEVE JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL MASS PGOV SOCI CS
SUBJECT: U.S. ARMY ENGINEERS BUILD COSTA RICAN BRIDGE

REF: A. SAN JOSE 071

¶B. SAN JOSE 401
¶C. SAN JOSE 003

¶1. (U) Following up on an official GOCR request, from June 18-22 five U.S. Army engineers built a Bailey-type metal bridge just south of Quepos, Costa Rica, over the Guabo River. The SOUTHCOM-allocated engineers also re-surveyed bridges and/or bridging sites located throughout the country that had been inspected last December (Ref A) as a result of devastating floods in October 2007. The new surveys and actual bridge construction come in the immediate aftermath of the effects of Tropical Storm Alma in mid-May. Using GOCR-supplied materials, the engineers worked hand-in-hand with two CNE (Costa Rica's FEMA-equivalent) engineers and local workers to construct the Guabo bridge, passing along valuable bridge-building techniques and best practices.

¶2. (U) As a result of flooding from Tropical Storm Alma, four local Costa Ricans (including two children) were killed trying to cross the old bridge over the Guabo River. The new Bailey-type bridge, 34 meters long, increases the height of the bridge by almost two meters and will allow light vehicles to cross the river such as cars, pick-ups and buses. The new bridge will directly (and positively) affect the lives of nearly 4000 Costa Ricans in this community.

¶3. (U) The CNE engineers who worked with our SOUTHCOM engineers told us they learned a lot and appreciated the training. One of them, Jorge Fallas, said that this was the first time they had any instruction or practice in the construction of a Bailey-type bridge and would use that knowledge to construct further bridges in Costa Rica.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador visited the Guabo bridge site on June 20 and was interviewed by reporters from the leading daily La Nacion and from television channels 6 and 13. The print interview appeared on June 21 and the television coverage on June 23. Media coverage referenced other successful SOUTHCOM humanitarian assistance projects, such as last December's medical readiness exercise (Ref B) and May's suspension bridge material airlift (Ref C) in the Talamanca area. All of the reporting was positive and highlighted the benefit of Costa Rican-U.S. teamwork to the local communities.

¶5. (U) Although not yet scheduled, the SOUTHCOM engineers plan to return to Costa Rica later this year to assist in the construction of further Bailey-type bridges located in the communities of Santa Rosa, Perez Zeledon; Volcan, Puntarenas, and Sapoa, Guanacaste.

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COMMENT
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¶6. (SBU) As noted, this bridge construction and new surveys came in the wake of a specific GOCR request for U.S. military assistance for humanitarian projects, and are another in the series of our recent joint efforts. The construction of the Guabo bridge clearly demonstrates the continued willingness of Costa Rica to engage with our military-supplied assets.

¶7. (SBU) By using soft military power, the construction of this Bailey-type bridge directly contributed to furthering two of our four Mission Strategic Plan goals for Costa Rica: investing in people and promoting prosperity. Post thanks SOUTHCOM for its support and specifically the five U.S. Army engineers for their valuable work. They worked very hard in hot, tropical jungle conditions and put forth a positive image of the U.S. government and military.
CIANCHETTE